

J.D. Ousley
Sermon—16Sep18
Mk. 8
“Finders’ Fee”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Advertising slogans are created to sell things.

The ads which you may have seen for Farmers Insurance always end with the slogan, “We know a thing or two because we’ve seen a thing or two.”

The slogan touts the company’s experience in paying off all kinds of unusual insurance claims for damage to peoples’ cars—an example is one family’s encounter with a moose!

Now preachers might wish that they could find a simple slogan that would describe the virtues of living a Christian life. If we had that slogan, we would find it easier to describe our faith to those who weren’t brought up in a church and who didn’t know much about the teachings of Jesus.

But whatever slogans we preachers might come up with, it *wouldn’t* be today’s Gospel passage!

In that lesson, Jesus says this: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

That’s not all. Jesus says that taking up crosses and denying ourselves the things that we like is just the beginning. He also tells his disciples, “...those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

The early followers of Jesus were given fair warning. They realized that when they signed on to the Way of Jesus Christ, they would be required to risk everything that they held dear. They faced countless hardships, from poverty to persecution. Many of them literally lost their lives for Christ’s sake.

Happily, though, this text is not all doom and gloom. After all, Jesus claims that those people who lose their lives will in the process “save” them. St. Matthew’s gospel version of this text says, “Those who *find* their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives because of me will *find* them.”

So the passage isn’t only about loss. The text assures us that when we lose ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we will at the same time find ourselves.

What does it actually mean, though, to “find ourselves?” In some ways, this is the question of all questions...

A recent welcome addition to life in New York City has been the vastly increased access we are getting to our *waterfront*. Brooklyn residents have a new park on the East River; Manhattanites have many new pathways along both the East River and the Hudson River. Commuters now have ferries that allow them to travel between many parts of the boroughs.

And one of the side benefits of access to the waterfront is that it gives us nice views of *the sky*. These views are a real gift. It’s not an exaggeration to say they are a spiritual blessing. To us, as today’s Psalm says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” The puffy white clouds and the blue sky literally are a gift from above.

“The heavens declare the glory of God...” I would hazard the claim that this is why even the most hardened skeptics feel touched by the Transcendent when they watch a beautiful sunset.

Right in front of them, they see the splendor of creation. They know that human beings did nothing themselves to make the sunset.

Looking at the truly “heavenly” skies, skeptics can’t escape the thought that they might have been put on earth by an infinitely greater force than themselves.

At the same time, this Psalm suggests that one way that we can find our lives is through discovering our place in the cosmos. Where we fit in. Where we are most at home.

Again, as Jesus noted, to find our lives is to *save* them. When we find the Spirit of God, God is able to save our lives from all sorts of threats to our happiness.

But, as Jesus points out, when we are dealing with the Spirit of God, we know that some values our culture holds dear can be put aside.

Our culture, for example, encourages *self-promotion*. We are expected to build up our resumes and, if necessary, blow our own horns!

As Christians, though, we can choose to limit these attempts to push ahead—to gain credit and things for ourselves. Sometimes, we’re better off sitting back and seeing where God is leading us. As we let things go, then we find what we’re looking for...

As well as trying to cut back on our excesses, we should also look to what we may *find*.

A “finder’s fee” goes to the agent who locates the perfect apartment for you. You pay the fee gladly because you are happy to have your new home.

Now what we give up in our quest to follow Christ’s teaching proves to be a kind of finder’s fee. It can be costly to serve God, but we know what we have to gain. We look forward to abundant life – life that is filled with the blessings God wants to give us.

Farmers’ Insurance claims to know a thing or two because they have seen a thing or two. Their expertise comes from their vast experience in paying off claims.

So our experience of living the Christian life suggests that when we give up our lives in love, we’re paying a “finder’s fee” for abundant living.

There is no way to sum up Christianity in a slogan. Our religion is complex. We need careful study and reflection if we are going to get the most out of it.

In that regard, I’d like to mention a parish project that has been proposed by our Spiritual Development Committee. The project is called, the Incarnation Book Challenge. Parishioners are being encouraged to read *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren.

Warren is pastor of the 30,000-member Saddleback Church in southern California. His book has sold an astounding 34 million copies! We encourage you to get a copy and read it this fall as part of your spiritual discipline. It may help you in your quest to find the life God wants you to have.

Finally, I’d like to say something especially for this day when we welcome many parishioners back to church after the summer vacations. We give thanks today for the return of our professional choir and for the resumption of Sunday School and the start of a new Junior Acolyte program.

As these and other activities begin, and as we give thanks to God for this parish, we can also glimpse a larger picture. Parish life is part of the fabric that God is weaving in our lives.

Finding our lives includes finding new energy for living. As far as God is concerned, the sky is the limit!

And now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due all might, majesty, power, dominion, and praise, now and forever. Amen.